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*Performing Historical Monarchs in
Early Modern England:
Beyond the History Play*

Kit Heyam



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Performing Historical Monarchs in Early Modern England: Beyond the History Play

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Abstract: This article discusses the use of performative techniques in prose accounts of the past written in early modern England. Building on scholarship that has located the source of early modern emotional engagement with the past in the history play, it shows that prose texts should be seen alongside history plays as forms that provided access to performance of historical characters. Chronicles, political texts, and other prose accounts of the past deployed invented speech, performative description, and interiorised characterisation at moments of heightened emotional and political intensity. Focusing as a case study on accounts of the reign of Edward II—which attracted substantial cross-genre attention, particularly from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, owing to its paradigmatic status as an exemplum of overmighty favourites and deposition, and which was shaped by writers of all genres into an emotionally compelling *de casibus* narrative structure—this article shows that the use of performative techniques in these texts facilitated both emotional and political engagement with the past. Attention to these performative elements of historical prose thus prompts us to reassess the complexity, interiority and vividness of chronicles; to reimagine the place of history plays in early modern culture, as one among many forms which provided access to performance of historical characters; and to augment our understanding of the process by which history was made usable; to reconfigure our understanding of the nature of early modern people’s relationship to the past, underlining the significance of the emotional dimension of that relationship alongside the utilitarian.

Keywords: historiography; chronicles; invented speech; interiority; emotions; Edward II; Elizabeth Cary; John Stow

How did early modern English people engage emotionally with the past? Answers to this question have often focused on history plays, and their relationship to early modern theories of emotional contagion. Allison P. Hobgood’s *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* maps the two-way operation of this contagion between actor and audience, sketching “a dangerously vibrant affective interplay between theatregoers and the English Renaissance stage”; while Evelyn Tribble has shown that theories of emotional

contagion can illuminate both what happened in the playhouse, and what antitheatricalists feared might happen.¹ Several recent studies have developed work on the physiological nature of early modern passions in order to locate the source of emotional engagement precisely in the affecting and affected bodies of actors and audiences.² Other scholars have called attention to the emotional impact of the way poetry ventriloquizes historical figures, and particularly the rash of poems written in the vein of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, which theatrically invoke the physical presence of a narrator from beyond the grave, asking the reader to listen to and learn from their *de casibus* tale.³ Yet analysing early modern historical prose suggests that a focus on performance and corporeality as loci of emotional engagement with history provides us with only a partial picture of what that engagement looked like in early modern England.

In this article, I argue that the kind of emotionally engaging historical content we might call *performative* was not restricted to drama in this period. In his discussion of the close and often coincident relationship between the concepts of “history” and “poetry” in early modern thought and literary culture, Blair Worden describes Camden and Raleigh’s histories as “suffused with a sense of theatricality”; I argue here for the much wider persistence of this “theatricality” across prose narratives of the past.⁴ Early modern prose historical narratives of all kinds—chronicles, biographies, even polemical pamphlets drawing on historical exempla—can be seen to “perform” their historical characters: to use techniques akin to those found in drama that position the reader as hearer or spectator, and engage their readers emotionally and politically with those characters. Invented speeches and detailed depictions of characters’ physicality performed historical figures audibly and visually, while interiority provided the reader with characters of the kind that—as many critics have argued—they had come to expect from the stage.⁵ The performative impact of historical prose narratives thus went beyond the

¹ Allison P. Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2; Katherine Rowe, “Humoral Knowledge and Liberal Cognition in Davenant’s *Macbeth*,” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 176; Evelyn Tribble, “Affective Contagion on the Early Modern Stage,” in *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts*, ed. Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 195–212. See also: Anu Korhonen, “Beauty, Masculinity and Love Between Men: Configuring Emotions with Michael Drayton’s *Peirs Gaveston*,” in *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800*, ed. Jonas Liliequist (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 136, on the “communicative and social” nature of early modern emotions.

² Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing*, 2–10; Lucy Munro, “Speaking History: Linguistic Memory and the Usable Past in the Early Modern History Play,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 523, 529; Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21; Tribble, “Affective Contagion,” 197, 202–203.

³ Mike Rodman Jones, “The Uses of Medievalism in Early Modern England: Recovery, Temporality, and the ‘Passionating’ of the Past,” *Exemplaria* 30, no. 3 (2018): 191–206; Blair Worden, “Historians and Poets,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68, no. 1–2 (March 2005): 87; Paul Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the De Casibus Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 74–76; *Parts Added to The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), 9; Louis Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1950), 78–79 and n. 41; Kelly Quinn, “Mastering Complaint: Michael Drayton’s *Peirs Gaveston* and the Royal Mistress Complaints,” *English Literary Renaissance* 38, no. 3 (2008): 443–444.

⁴ Worden, “Historians and Poets,” 82.

⁵ See, for example: Richard Preiss, “Interiority,” in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford

group reading in which many early modern historical texts anticipated being shared, and became part of solitary reading too.⁶ These techniques, as I will show, invited thoughtful, careful, and intentional emotional connection. I call this emotional engagement, rather than affective engagement, in order to signal this intentionality—while also recognising that, as Benedict S. Robinson has shown, early modern English culture understood “passion as a kind of cognition,” and thus the distinction drawn by affect theorists between affect and emotion is an imperfect fit for early modern understanding in this respect.⁷

These performative elements in historical prose are usually, by necessity, invented ones. Speeches attributed to historical figures, depictions of interiority, visual and physical description of set-piece scenes: all of them are features that required creativity and literary agency on the part of the writer, in addition to research into historical fact or transcription of earlier sources. As such, discussion of them has often been framed in relation to accounts that see a “historical revolution” taking place in the seventeenth century. As is well known, the term “history” in early modern English culture did not straightforwardly indicate a factual narrative, or indeed a prose one; instead, it referred to a wide spectrum of narratives written in different forms and with different proportions of, and attitudes towards, invented content.⁸ The argument for a “historical revolution,” a term coined by Frank Smith Fussner in his 1962 monograph, holds that historical methodology shifted in the first half of the seventeenth century: moving away from this capacious definition of history and the sense of an intimate, overlapping relationship between history and poetry, and towards the prioritisation of evidence, proof and verifiable fact.⁹ This shift, the argument goes, ushered in a new era of antiquarian research; and, concurrently, of what became known following the work of F.J. Levy as “politic history,” characterised by the detailed scrutiny of human motivations for events rather than a broader sense of providential causes.

University Press, 2017), 47–69; Joe Falocco, “‘Shakespeare Has It Both Ways’: Character and Form in Performance,” *New England Theatre Journal* 25 (2014): 93–110; Alan C. Dessen, “Allegorical Action and Elizabethan Staging,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 55, no. 2, (Spring 2015): 391–402; Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 108–109.

⁶ R.W. Maslen, “Elizabethan Popular Romance and the Popular Novel,” in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1:200; Daniel Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 80–83.

⁷ Benedict S. Robinson, “Thinking Feeling,” in *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts*, ed. Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 109–127.

⁸ Worden, “Historians and Poets”; Robert Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8; Lori Humphrey Newcomb, “Cross-Sections (2): 1596–1600,” in *Oxford History of the Novel*, ed. Keymer, 1:57; Miles Taylor, “The End of the English History Play in ‘Perkin Warbeck,’” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 396; Daniel Woolf, “Genre into Artifact: The Decline of the English Chronicle in the Sixteenth Century,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 347–351; Woolf, *Reading History*, 8.

⁹ Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel*, 8–9; F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1962). See also: Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 119, 146.

As Robert Mayer rightly argues, while the “historical revolution” paradigm provides an accurate summary of a longer-term trend, its insistence on a wholesale monodirectional move towards a historiographical methodology seen as “modern” has somewhat Whiggish tendencies.¹⁰ Yet despite growing recognition of this problem, its impact has been long-lasting.¹¹ One area in which, I would suggest, Fussner’s paradigm still makes its influence felt is the contention that early modern chronicles lack a sense of interiority.¹² In fairness to scholars who advance this argument, many early modern writers would seem to support their points. Thomas Nashe famously contrasted the way that “our forefathers valiant acts ... have lain long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books” with the impact of history plays, which enable the figure of “brave Talbot” to “triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.”¹³ Similarly, Raphael Holinshed described his own *Chronicles* as “having rather a regarde to simple truth, than to decking wordes.”¹⁴ But when we read early modern chronicles closely—including Holinshed’s own—their modes of representing the past often do not straightforwardly support these contemporary arguments. I have argued elsewhere that early modern chronicle accounts, and thus the reputations of historical figures, were substantially influenced by literary texts, techniques, and motivations.¹⁵ Here, I want to examine the ways in which chronicles and other prose historical accounts—by which I here mean accounts *of the past*, with or without invented elements—were not just literary, but performative. Nashe’s depiction of the vivid reanimation of a historical figure, and its emotional impact on those who engage with it, may focus on history plays, but it is a not inaccurate description of what I will argue is a thoroughly cross-genre phenomenon.

The problem with this perspective on chronicles as non-interiorised is not just its failure to accurately represent these texts. It is also that, when combined with the critical tendency to see chronicles as *sources for* drama and poetry—rather than to appreciate both as stages in a complex and literary process of historiographical influence and rewriting—this perspective has led to a focus on the exceptionalism of drama as a site of emotional engagement.¹⁶ Poetry also receives some acknowledgement of its capacity to elicit emotion—particularly given Sidney’s defence of its power to move the reader—but poetry scholarship often serves simply to expand this exceptionalist approach, rather than to develop a genuinely

¹⁰ Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel*, 9. See also: Worden, “Historians and Poets,” 74–75, 80.

¹¹ Worden, “Historians and Poets,” 73–75; Woolf, *Reading History*, 7. See also Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), for a useful and influential approach to history as a literary genre in later periods.

¹² For instance: Woolf, *Reading History*, 34–35; Maureen Godman, “Stow’s *Summarie*: Source for Marlowe’s *Edward II*,” *Notes and Queries* 40 (1993): 161.

¹³ Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Divell* (London, 1592; STC 18371), sig. F3r.

¹⁴ Munro, “Speaking History,” 524–525.

¹⁵ Kit Heyam, *The Reputation of Edward II, 1305–1697* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).

¹⁶ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 277–283.

pluralistic sense of the kinds of history-reading that generated emotional engagement in early modern England.¹⁷ This can also mean that generically contested prose texts, such as Elizabeth Cary's *History of Edward II*, are caught up in critical arguments about whether their interiority and other performative elements mean that they are "really" drama or prose fiction or history, which can obstruct more substantive discussion of these aspects of their content.

Thus, while the evidence I discuss in this article could be marshalled in support of an argument about the nature of early modern genre, or about what precisely constituted history or poetry at different points in the period, I am primarily interested in analysing the kind of *techniques* writers used to evoke the past, rather than in assigning these techniques to generic categories. Equally, I am less interested in detecting the influence of drama on other genres, or in pinning down the directional flow of influence, than I am in reconstructing a fuller picture of what early modern people's emotional relationships to the past were like, and what kinds of reading impacted those relationships. To reverse Richard Preiss's argument about the *origins* of interiority in early modern theatre, and apply it instead to a consideration of early modern readers' and theatregoers' *experience*, "dramatic interiority" may have "originated on the stage," but it "flourished in the act of reading."¹⁸ Building on Daniel Woolf's claim that "historical discourse was increasingly a key part of sociable relations, including casual conversation, playfulness and courtship, human interactions that *run a gamut of feeling* from the sublime to the ridiculous, and which embrace an even wider range of conversational contexts from the political and economic to the sexual and drunken," I want to locate some of the specific techniques that helped achieve this emotional engagement with the past through reading prose texts, and to argue for the importance of those techniques which "performed" early modern historical figures.¹⁹

Clearly, the nature of early modern emotional engagement with the past depended in large part on the precise nature of that "past," including its intersection with issues such as nationality and gender, and how its relation to folklore and fictionality was understood.²⁰ I hope this article may prove a starting point for work that develops these considerations more specifically in these directions. My focus here, as a case study for analysing the use of performative techniques in prose historical accounts and their capacity to engage the reader emotionally, will be on accounts of the life of Edward II composed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. I want to use this focus in part to make the case for the centrality of representations of historical monarchs to the use of performative techniques in prose

¹⁷ See, for example: Jones, "Uses of Medievalism"; Munro, "Speaking History," 525; Rebecca Lemon, "The Faulty Verdict in 'The Crown v. John Hayward,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 41, no. 1 (2001): 113.

¹⁸ Preiss, "Interiority," 48.

¹⁹ Woolf, *Reading History*, 131.

²⁰ On nationality, see: Igor Djordjevic, *Holinshed's Nation: Ideals, Memory, and Practical Policy in the Chronicles* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). On gender, see: Meredith Skura, "Elizabeth Cary and Edward II: What Do Women Want to Write?," *Renaissance Drama* 27 (1996): 79–104. On folklore and fictionality, see: Daniel Woolf, "Of Danes and Giants: Popular Beliefs About the Past in Early Modern England," *Dalhousie Review* (1991): 166–209.

historical accounts. Monarchs were, very often, the “protagonists” of prose accounts of the past: the figures whose decisions, and emotions, mattered most to the narrative. It was thus their political actions, and the emotions and motivations behind them, which received the most scrutiny as part of the process of making history usable (discussed more fully below). Moreover, the lives of monarchs were understood to typically reflect a *de casibus* narrative structure: a pattern, following the example of Boccaccio’s *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, by which the central figure rotated around Fortune’s wheel, ascending to a high social status before falling back to a low one.²¹ Crucial to constructing this narrative structure—which can be observed in numerous prose historical accounts—was emotional engagement: eliciting the reader’s sympathy for a fallen monarch.²² This structure also facilitated the interpretation of its subject as a moral exemplum: hubristic monarchs should know that their triumph will be followed by a fall, and readers should be prepared to apply this lesson to their own moral and political lives.

As my recent work on Edward II’s reputation has shown, accounts of his reign written in all genres often followed a *de casibus* narrative structure and were embellished with sensational detail, both of which demanded emotional engagement in the form of sympathy for the suffering fallen Edward. Accounts of Edward II’s life are an apt case study here for two other reasons. Firstly, his reign attracted substantial cross-genre attention, particularly from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, including, of course, Marlowe’s play *Edward II* (c.1591–1592). This means that a large number of prose accounts of his reign are available for analysis; but more pertinently, it means that there is substantial room to contribute to the critical conversation around his afterlife, since much of the scholarship on early modern accounts of Edward’s reign bears traces of the dramatic exceptionalism I described earlier.²³ In particular, it allows for a fresh analysis of the impact of performative techniques in Elizabeth Cary’s *History of Edward II*.

Secondly, and perhaps most usefully, one of the key reasons that so many accounts of Edward II’s reign were written in different genres was its paradigmatic status as a political exemplum of overmighty favourites and deposition.²⁴ This means that accounts of his reign provide a productive focus for thinking about the relationship between emotional and political engagement with the past for early modern readers. As is well known, history was seen as a usable source of both general principles and specific examples applicable to everyday political and moral decision-making.²⁵ This applied both to chronicles and to other forms of history;

²¹ Budra, *Mirror for Magistrates*, xiii, 18, 85–87, 92; Howard Rollin Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (London: F. Cass, 1967), 59–60, 164–166.

²² Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 215–236.

²³ See, for instance: Michael G. Cornelius, *Edward II and a Literature of Same-Sex Love: The Gay King in Fiction, 1590–1640* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 263–264; Godman, “Stow’s *Summarie*,” 161.

²⁴ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 177–208.

²⁵ Thomas Blundeville, *The True Order and Methode of Wryting and Reading Hystories* (London, 1574; STC 3161), sig. F3r; Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” *Past &*

and as contemporary writers including Nashe and Sidney indicated, emotionally engaging content could be seen to facilitate the moral and political utility of a historical account.²⁶ My analysis of the use of performative techniques in prose accounts of Edward II's reign will therefore contribute in part to this study of how history was made usable for early modern readers: these techniques, I argue, developed readers' perspectives on historical monarchs as rounded characters whose decisions could be analysed and emulated (or avoided), and whose troubles could be appreciated emotionally and remembered effectively. But this does not mean we should see these performative techniques as simply politically motivated. For one thing, it seems clear that they had concurrent commercial motivations. Historical accounts that fulfilled readers' demands for compelling narrative structure and emotional engagement were popular and influential; and as Richard Preiss has argued, character functioned as "an expansion bracket, a growth market" in early modern literary culture, in that engaging characterisation of a historical/fictional figure stimulated demand for further representation of them.²⁷ And for another, I suggest that we should see these performative techniques and the emotional engagement they facilitated as a core part of the way in which early modern people positioned and conceptualised themselves in relation to the past. As such, analysing these techniques should prompt us to reconfigure our understanding of the nature of early modern people's relationship to the past, underlining the significance of the emotional dimension of that relationship alongside the utilitarian. Concurrently, it suggests the need to reimagine the place of history plays in early modern culture, as one among many forms which provided access to performance of historical characters, and as part of a larger cultural structure for engaging emotionally both with the past as a whole and with historical monarchs and their exercise of royal power. Performative techniques in historical prose provided a lens through which readers could see and hear royal power wielded, both successfully and unsuccessfully; allowed writers to construct rhetorical defences of royal power through invented speeches; and, through accounts of past attempts to contest or limit royal power, facilitated readers' emulation of these attempts in their contemporary political contexts.

Invented Speech

In both modern and early modern discussions of the relationship between history and fact, and the role of the historian in relation to the events they recount, the invented speech has been something of a focal point. Thomas Blundeville, in his 1574 *True Order and Method of Writing and Reading Histories*, argued that "hystoriographers ought not to fayne any Orations nor any other

Present 129 (1990): 30–78; Woolf, *Reading History*; Budra, *Mirror for Magistrates*, 21–22; Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 273–274; Taylor, "End of the English History Play," 397.

²⁶ Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse*, sig. F3r; Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* (1595), ed. J.A. Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 27; Worden, "History and Poetry," 71, 65.

²⁷ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 280; Preiss, "Interiority," 48.

thing, but truly to reporte every such speech, and deede, even as it was spoken, or done.”²⁸ William Camden, as part of an extended claim that his account of Elizabeth I’s reign did not contain any components which “use to obscure and prejudice the Light of Truth,” specified that “Speeches and Orations, unless they be the very same *verbatim*, or else abbreviated, I have not medled withall, much less faigned.”²⁹ Notwithstanding arguments like Blundeville’s, and the methodological influence of writers like Camden and Francis Bacon, invented speech features as part of many early modern historical prose accounts. Originating in Greek history, and specifically in Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War*—in which Thucydides emphasised the decorous nature of his invented orations, “given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express on the subjects under consideration, the sentiments most befitting the occasion”—invented speech provides a *quasi*-theatrical experience for the reader, simultaneously positioning them as an auditor of events and characterising historical figures as real, speaking individuals.³⁰ As Rebecca Lemon has argued, invented speeches are often comparable to theatre in their “imaginative and rhetorical power,” sometimes—as in the case of John Hayward’s 1599 history of Henry IV’s reign—leading their persuasive and engaging force to be interpreted as seditious.³¹ Mike Rodman Jones—in a consideration of poetry whose implications can also be applied to other texts which “ventriloquize” historical figures—recognises their emotional impact, arguing that “the highly affective ‘passionating’ of both Daniel and Drayton,” in their poetic accounts of history, “depended on a comparable emphasis on *effects of voice*, on *using poetry to respeak the voices of the premodern dead*.”³² In accounts of Edward II’s reign, invented speeches function to encourage the reader to condemn Edward’s transgressions as king and draw out their contemporary applications; to develop his characterisation as a suffering figure following his deposition, thereby increasing his utility and memorability as a cautionary example while also positioning the writer as clearly anti-deposition; and, in political texts, to provide a proforma for dissent.

Early modern writers drew their accounts of Edward’s reign from medieval sources with a variety of attitudes to invented content. The account in the popular encyclopaedic *Polychronicon* of Ranulf Higden (the first version of which was composed around 1327), along with many of the briefer monastic chronicles, occasionally reported indirect speech but did not attribute any speeches directly to its characters.³³ By contrast, several longer texts including the contemporaneous *Annales Paulini* and the popular, influential *Brut* chronicle (c.1333-1347)

²⁸ Blundeville, *True Order*, sig. E4r.

²⁹ William Camden, *The Historie of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princesse Elizabeth* (London, 1630; STC 4500), sig. B2v. See also: Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel*, 9, 21–22; Barbara Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 60; Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 119; Taylor, “The End of the English History Play,” 398.

³⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War, Books I and II*, trans. Charles Forster Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 1:xxii.

³¹ Lemon, “Faulty Verdict,” 114.

³² Jones, “Uses of Medievalism,” 193, emphasis added.

³³ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby (London: Longman, 1865), 8:296–323.

incorporated lively dialogue and emotional soliloquies into their accounts.³⁴ The *Brut*, whose popularity both in manuscript and in print is testament to the sensational nature of its narrative, was used as a source for Edward's reign (and others) by several early modern writers, including Polydore Vergil, Robert Fabyan, Richard Grafton, Raphael Holinshed, and John Stow.

Stow's account of Edward's reign in his *Chronicles* (first printed in 1580, and later retitled *Annales*) mostly confines itself to indirect speech. The dying Edward I "commaunded [his son] to honoure hys mother, and love hys two brethren"; the English nobles "declared to the King, that except he would expell the sayd Pierce [Gaveston] from his company, they would rise agaynest him."³⁵ His narrative sometimes positions the reader as hearer without explicit invented speech, as when Thomas, Lord Berkeley, is ordered to leave the imprisoned Edward alone and "tak[es] his leave with sighes."³⁶ But his one moment of invented speech is engaging, memorable, and striking. It occurs as the deposed Edward is being transported from Bristol to Berkeley Castle:

These Champions (as I sayd) bring the olde king towardes Barkeley, being guarded with a rabble of Helhoundes, along by the graunges belonging to the Castell of Bristow, where that wicked man Gerney making a crown of Hey, put it on hys heade, and the souldiours that were aboute him mocked him, saying, tprut, avaunt sir King, making a kinde of noise with theyr mouthes, as though they had farted. ... Moreover devising by all meanes to disfigure him that hee mighte not be knowen, they determined to shave as well the heare off hys heade as also off his bearde, wherefore comming by a little Water whiche ranne in a ditche, they commaunded him to alighte from his horse to be shaven: to whome being set on a Molehill, a Barbour came with a Baron of colde Water taken out of the ditch, to whom Edward sayd, shall I have no warme water? the Barber answered, this wyll serve: quoth Edward, will ye or nil yee I will have warme water: and that he might keepe his promise, he beganne to weepe and to shed teares plentifullye (as it was reported by William Byshop, to sir Thomas de la More knight).³⁷

It is relevant for the assessment of Stow's historiographical method that he explicitly describes this atypical scene as eyewitness testimony, suggesting that he was engaged in contemporary

³⁴ See, for instance: "Annales Paulini," in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. William Stubbs (London, 1882), 1:253–370; John Capgrave, *John Capgrave's Abbreviation of Cronicles*, ed. by Peter J. Lucas (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1983), 178; *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. and trans. Wendy R. Childs and Noël Denholm-Young (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 47–49, 59–61; Walter of Guisborough, *The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough*, ed. Harry Rothwell (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1957), 382–323.

³⁵ John Stow, *The Chronicles of England* (London, 1580; STC 23333), sig. X2r, X5r.

³⁶ Stow, *Chronicles*, sig. Z3r.

³⁷ Stow, *Chronicles*, sig. Z2v.

conversations about the role of the historian, and was concerned that his narrative be viewed as a reliable historical account.³⁸ Yet this scene also functions to engage the reader and characterise Edward II. The ex-King is assailed by indignities, subjected both to Christological mockery that underlines his deposed state, and to the bodily discomfort of a non-consensual, cold-water shave. Edward's tearful quip—"will ye or nil yee I will have warme water"—elicits both sympathy and admiration for his unexpected reclamation of agency: his body is subject to forcible transport and transformation, but he retains sufficient bodily autonomy to provide himself with a warm-water shave, claiming for himself the courtesy he has otherwise been denied by his captors. The reader's sympathy for Edward in his fallen state, as a king at the lowest point of a *de casibus* narrative structure following his earlier pride and indulgence, is bolstered by the biblical allusion of the crown of hay and the essentialist portrait of the resistant, dignified royal body—all of which also reify the status of the fallen Edward as a moral exemplum, and simultaneously emphasise the sinfulness of deposition.³⁹

This anecdote, which also appears in several other early modern accounts of Edward's reign, is drawn from the sensational and sympathetic *Chronicon* of Geoffrey le Baker (c.1347), to which Stow had access in manuscript.⁴⁰ But the most idiosyncratic element of Stow's version is the way in which the soldiers mock Edward. Stow's vivid auditory depiction of this scene is not just verbal ("Avaunt sir King") but non-verbal: the soldiers accompany their mocking words with the sound "tprut," "making a kinde of noise with theyr mouthes, as though they had farted." The specific signification of "tprut" is, brilliantly, Stow's own interpolation. While the rest of this anecdote is a relatively close translation of le Baker, Stow takes the un-glossed word "tprut" from his source ("*milites dixerunt: (tprut) 'Avant, sire kyng'*": "the knights said, 'Tprut. Avaunt, Sir King'") and makes it clearly legible.⁴¹ What was previously an ambiguous noise of disrespect—perhaps a "tut," perhaps a parody of a fanfare, perhaps just an inapposite and therefore irreverent clicking of the tongue—becomes specific, scatological, and humorous. With this addition, Stow adds to the indignities heaped upon the pathetic Edward, thereby intensifying the engaging, memorable nature of this performative scene. His readers will remember Edward as a sympathetic figure, and as a compelling exemplum of the evils of deposition and the inevitability of a *de casibus* pattern in the lives of monarchs, because they have been positioned as spectators and auditors—but also because of the fart noise.

While most chroniclers of Edward II's reign who deploy invented speeches interpolate

³⁸ See: Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel*, 9, 22.

³⁹ See: Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 215–236.

⁴⁰ Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker*, ed. Richard Barber, trans. David Preest (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 30; Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 128, 140–141, 217–218, 224–225. See also: Samuel Daniel, *The Collection of the Historie of England* (London, 1618; STC 6248), sig. R3r; Richard Baker, *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London, 1643; Wing B501), sig. T4v; Lambert van den Bos, *Florus Anglicus* (London, 1656; Wing B3777A), sig. G2r. On the function of anecdotes in historiography, see: Ruth Morse, "Medieval Biography: History as a Branch of Literature," *Modern Language Review* 80, no. 2 (April 1985): 262.

⁴¹ Geoffrey le Baker, *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Snynebroke*, ed. E.M. Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 31.

them in this short, occasional fashion, Elizabeth Cary uses them much more extensively. Cary's history of Edward's reign was composed around 1626 while she was living alone in poverty, separated from her family and deprived of her husband's financial support following her conversion to Catholicism.⁴² Cary reworked her history in manuscript, but it remained unprinted until 1680 when, along with other historical narratives of deposition, it was printed for its relevance to the Exclusion Crisis. Two printed versions exist: the folio *History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II*, and the octavo *History of the Most Unfortunate Prince King Edward II*. Both versions were probably revised by their 1680s publishers before being printed, in light of both their immediate political context and the hindsight offered by the civil wars of the 1640s (Cary had died in 1639). The octavo text—shorter, and closer to Cary's earlier manuscript version, though also bearing the signs of 1680 editorial intervention—is attributed on the title page to Cary's husband, and the folio simply to E.F.⁴³ Cary's preface to the reader notes that her "Historical Relation" "speaks a King," and the text proceeds to do so at length.⁴⁴

Cary's *History* combines detailed psychological realism with allusions to the politics of 1620s England, particularly the excessive power of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. Its generic classification has been thoroughly debated. Cary was a dramatist—her play *The Tragedy of Mariam, Fair Queen of Jewry* was printed in 1613—and the *History* has been interpreted by some as a playtext. Donald Stauffer goes to some lengths to suggest that the entire narrative is written in end-stopped blank verse, despite being printed in prose; Tina Krontiris argues that it "appears to be an unfinished play or a biography influenced by drama"; Janet Starnier-Wright and Susan Fitzmaurice describe it as "depicting history as drama"; and Michael Cornelius reads it unequivocally as drama, formatting his quotations as blank verse.⁴⁵ Louise Schleiner frames it as proto-novelistic prose, but Karen Britland sees this generic classification as gendered and reductive, arguing along with Barbara Lewalski that Cary's text is "a new sort of Tacitean 'politic' history."⁴⁶ Yet whether or not Cary wrote her history as blank verse in manuscript, it was received by her readers in the 1680s as a prose text. In my view, her detailed scrutiny of human motivations and emotions, her attention to her characters' interiority, and her long and

⁴² Karen Britland, "'Kings Are But Men': Elizabeth Cary's Histories of Edward II," *Études Épistémè. Revue de Littérature et de Civilisation (XVIe–XVIIIe Siècles)* 17 (2010): 34.

⁴³ Britland, "'Kings Are But Men,'" 31. On the text's authorship, see Skura, "Elizabeth Cary and Edward II."

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Cary, *The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II* (London, 1680; Wing F313), sig. A2v. My analysis in this article will focus on this version, the longer folio text.

⁴⁵ Donald A. Stauffer, "A Deep and Sad Passion," in *The Parrott Presentation Volume*, ed. Hardin Craig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), 289–314; Tina Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1992), 91; Janet Starnier-Wright and Susan M. Fitzmaurice, "Shaping a Drama Out of a History: Elizabeth Cary and the Story of Edward II," *Critical Survey* 14 (2002): 84; Cornelius, *Edward II*, 31, 223.

⁴⁶ Louise Schleiner, "Lady Falkland's Re-entry into Writing," in *The Witness of Times*, ed. Katherine Z. Keller and Gerald J. Schiffhorst (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1993), 210; Helen Moore, "Chivalric Romance and Novella Collections," in *Oxford History of the Novel*, ed. Keymer, 1:155; Britland, "'Kings Are But Men,'" 32, 35–36; Barbara Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 203.

rhetorical invented speeches suggest influences from all of these genres, including novelistic elements (a claim which need no longer be seen as reductive, especially given that, as Robert Mayer has demonstrated, the novel developed in dialogue with early modern discourses of history).⁴⁷ Her invented speeches, which are sometimes soliloquies and sometimes addressed to other characters, function both to provide usable aphorisms with contemporary application and to develop the characterisation of her historical figures.

Writing in poverty and effective confinement, Cary did not have access to the wide range of sources used by Stow: her work relies particularly on Richard Grafton's 1569 *Chronicle At Large*, somewhat outdated by the 1620s, but also shows the influence of Michael Drayton and Francis Hubert's poems on Edward's reign, Geoffrey le Baker's *Chronicon*, and Marlowe's *Edward II*.⁴⁸ Her long invented speeches may, therefore, be influenced by these poetic and dramatic accounts. Like Stow's and others', Cary's speeches are attached to moments of heightened emotional and political intensity: deathbeds, separations, clashes between Edward and his nobles, and Edward's imprisonment after his deposition. In the printed editions, the speeches are set out as separate italicised blocks, framing them as requiring a distinct kind of readerly engagement.

Deathbed speeches by Edward I and Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, predict and foreshadow Edward II's transgressions ("Mushrooms in State that are preferr'd by dotage, open the Gap to Hate and Civil Tumult"; "Your Sovereign cares not how the State be guided, so he may still enjoy his wanton Pleasures") and provide generalised warnings which guide the reader in applying Edward's example to contemporary politics: "The Sovereigns Vice begets the Subjects Errour, who practise good or ill by his Example."⁴⁹ Cary intensifies the performative, auditory qualities of Edward I's dying speech by emphasising its momentary nature and using it to dramatize the old King's death: "It is my last Request; I, dying, make it, which I do firmly hope you will not blemish. I would say more, but, ah, my Spirits fail me."⁵⁰ Similarly, Queen Isabella's speech to her brother, the King of France—having been sent to negotiate over tensions concerning the English-controlled territory of Gascony, she takes the opportunity to complain of her husband's neglect—provides a vehicle both for auditory performance and visual description: she asks her brother, "Behold in me ... the true picture of a dejected Greatness, that bears the grief of a despised Wedlock," and notes "My blushing cheek may give a silent knowledge," while also describing in an invented speech the "world of tryals" which both she and England have suffered.⁵¹ Contrary to some critics' arguments (discussed below), Cary's characterisation through invented speech is extended to Edward as well as Isabella: his speeches initially depict him as proud and resistant to counsel ("Am I your

⁴⁷ Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel*.

⁴⁸ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 309.

⁴⁹ Cary, *History*, sigs. C2r, K1v, C1v.

⁵⁰ Cary, *History*, sig. C2r.

⁵¹ Cary, *History*, sig. 2B2v.

King? If so, why then obey me; lest while you teach me Law, I learn you Duty”), and elicit pathos for his grief at Gaveston’s death while demonstrating his obliviousness to his favourite’s clear political transgressions (“Could they not spare his Life, O cruel Tygers? What had he done, or how so much offended?”), before a long soliloquy uttered during his imprisonment presents him as the fallen *de casibus* figure familiar from Stow and other sources influenced by le Baker.⁵² Cary sets her scene here in detail, outlining his audience and thereby positioning his speech precisely in its performative context: “in the presence of two or three of those that were as well set to be Spies over him, as to guard him, in a deep Melancholy Passion he thus discours’d his Sorrow.” Edward’s speech then opens with a succession of rhetorical questions crafted to elicit sympathy, beginning, “Is mine offence ... so great and grievous, that it deserves nor pity nor assistance?”⁵³ The reader is engaged here not just by being positioned as auditor, but by being directly questioned, and prompted to see Edward’s suffering as an excessive punishment for his previous transgressions. Following his speech, Cary’s narrative shifts briefly into the historic present: “Here with a deep sigh of scalding Passions, his tears break loose afresh, to cool their fury.”⁵⁴ Like Edward I’s dramatized death, this builds on the impact of her invented speech to position her narrative as momentary and contemporaneous with the act of reading, heightening its immediacy and taking the reading experience closer to that of a performance.⁵⁵

Stow and Cary’s accounts, which combine a transgressive King Edward with a suffering and pathetic deposed Edward, are typical of the polyvalent, carefully equivocal nature of early modern accounts of his reign. Typically, narratives of Edward II written in this period engage the reader with the political pertinence and sensational scandal of his life, before switching to a sympathetic perspective after his deposition in order both to create a pleasurable recognisable *de casibus* narrative structure for their readers, and to avoid censure by clearly disavowing his deposition.⁵⁶ The exception to this rule is the significant number of polemical texts which deployed Edward’s reign as an exemplum of favouritism and/or deposition. Approaches to Edward’s deposition in these texts worked both ways: writers could either frame it as a cautionary example of the evils resulting from removal of a monarch, pointing out that deposition led to Edward’s murder and, somewhat less directly, the Wars of the Roses; or they could use it, often alongside narratives of Richard II, as evidence that England had a precedent for successfully deposing a king.

These polemical accounts were published in greatest numbers in the 1640s and 1680s: before and during the English Civil War, and around the Exclusion Crisis and Glorious

⁵² Cary, *History*, sigs. E1r, I2v, 2O2r–2P1r.

⁵³ Cary, *History*, sig. 2O2v.

⁵⁴ Cary, *History*, sig. 2P1r. On Cary’s use of the historic present, see: Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, “Shaping a Drama”; Britland, “‘Kings Are But Men’,” 37–38.

⁵⁵ Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, “Shaping a Drama,” 84.

⁵⁶ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 165–168, 235–236.

Revolution.⁵⁷ In 1642, a text purporting to be a speech arguing against Richard II's deposition delivered by Thomas Merk, then Bishop of Carlisle, was printed as *A Pious and Learned Speech Delivered in the High Court of Parliament, 1. H. 4.* This speech uses Edward's deposition to argue against Richard's, contending that "We must live according to Laws, and not to Examples," and pointing out that in any case, the deposed Edward was succeeded by his son ("And yet the kingdom was not then taken from the lawful Successour") rather than by an interloper like Bolingbroke.⁵⁸ By presenting this text as a verbatim record of a historical oration, the anonymous writer provided the public with an apparent prophetic warning from history: a voice which seemed both to invite contemporary application in the vein of all usable history, and—in its reference to Edward, a deposition past—to speak *directly* to their contemporary moment by pointing out that precedents were not law and that succession was. The text was reprinted in 1679 as *The Bishop of Carlile's Speech in Parliament, Concerning Deposing of Princes*, providing a similar warning about the future of James II's succession.⁵⁹

In 1689, another anonymous text deployed Edward II's example in relation to James II, this time as retrospective justification for James's forced abdication. *A True relation of the manner of the deposing of King Edward II* provides a detailed account of how a king can be viably deposed. In order to demonstrate the practicality of the deposition process, the writer reproduces the articles of Edward's deposition, before using invented speech to show how Edward's nobles renounced their homage:

These Procurators being come to the King, one Sir *William Trussel* Knight, Procurator of all the Parliament, in the Name of himself, and the rest of his Colleagues, spoke to the King in this manner: *I William Trussell, Procurator of the Prelates, Earls, Barons, and all other People named in my Deputation, being fully and sufficiently impowered for the purpose, do Resign and Surrender the Homage and Fealty formerly made to you, Edward King of England, as King, by these Persons mentioned in my Commission, which I do by virtue of the Power aforesaid, Resign and Surrender to you Edward; and I do discharge and acquit these Persons in the best manner which Law and Custom will allow of: And I do make this Protestation in their Name, that they will not be hereafter in your Fealty and Allegiance; neither will they claim to hold anything of you as their King; and that they will for ever hereafter take you to be a person wholly deprived of all manner of Royal Dignity.*⁶⁰

Combined with the articles of deposition, this speech provides a legalistic formula for the means by which a monarch can be stripped of their royal power. Trussell here is presented as a

⁵⁷ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 193–196.

⁵⁸ *A Pious and Learned Speech Delivered in the High Court of Parliament, 1. H. 4.* by Thomas Mercks Then Bishop of Carlile (London, 1642; Wing M1826), sig. A4r.

⁵⁹ *The Bishop of Carlile's speech in parliament, concerning deposing of princes* (London, 1679; Wing M1827).

⁶⁰ *A True Relation of the Manner of the Deposing of King Edward II* (London, 1689; Wing T3002), sig. A3v.

historical figure who, the writer suggests, politicians of the 1680s might themselves ventriloquize; their use of direct speech communicates reliability and legal precedent. Unlike the invented speeches of Stow and Cary, which cement their texts' equivocal political stance, Trussell and the Bishop of Carlisle appear as polemical orators from the past, invoked in order to persuade and provide scripts for the present.

Performative Description

As the above extracts from Cary's *History* show, writers of prose historical narratives often combined invented speech with depiction of characters' bodily actions: they blush, sigh, swoon, and cry, helping to construct the speech as performance rather than simply as record. These performative descriptions can also be found decoupled from invented speeches. In Cary's text, they position the reader as spectator as well as auditor, and—through the responses of spectators and auditors within the text—at times also guide their emotional responses.

Cary pays close attention to the facial expressions of her characters. As discussed below, she carefully clarifies when these facial expressions reflect their inward feelings, and when they do not; but the impact in either case is to construct a vivid, visual experience for the reader. Negotiating with his nobles to secure Gaveston's recall from exile, for example, Edward adopts "a more familiar and mild look" to accompany his verbal persuasions; while his reunion with Gaveston is "accompanied with as many mutual expressions, as might flow from the tongues, eyes, and hearts of long-divided Lovers," performing the two men's love through verbal, visual and interiorised expression.⁶¹ Additionally, her frequent use of the historic present enables her—as Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice have observed—to present her characters' actions as dramatic, contemporaneously observed events.⁶² Following Gaveston's death, Edward "withdraws him to his melancholy Chamber," where "His manly tears bewray his inward sorrow, and make him seem to melt with height of Passion."⁶³ Similarly, when Queen Isabella discovers that her brother, the King of France, is planning to exile her on the Pope's orders rather than support her, "she falls upon her knee imploring pitie," while "A showre of mellow tears, as milde as *April's*, thrill down her lovely cheeks, made red with anger."⁶⁴ These performative descriptions elicit the reader's empathy for Cary's historical characters, while her use of the historic present "suggests to the listener that its significance is relevant to the moment in which the story is told."⁶⁵ A narrative which positions the reader as a contemporaneous observer invites and facilitates contemporary parallels.

The Edward II of chronicle accounts also cries, particularly when he is brought news

⁶¹ Cary, *History*, sig. E1v–E2r, F1r.

⁶² Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, "Shaping a Drama," 84.

⁶³ Cary, *History*, sig. I2v.

⁶⁴ Cary, *History*, sig. 2D2r.

⁶⁵ Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, "Shaping a Drama," 84; see also Britland, "'Kings Are But Men,'" 38.

of his deposition: Stow, for example, uses indirect speech for Edward's response to the deposition party, but renders the scene performative nonetheless by specifying that "the Kyng aunswared with teares."⁶⁶ Accounts of Edward's deposition which rely on Geoffrey le Baker (either directly or via Stow or Holinshed) often also include other performative elements: Edward appears wearing mourning robes, and falls to the floor in a swoon at being asked to resign the crown.⁶⁷ The most frequently performative element of the chronicle narratives is, however, the scene in which Edward is murdered. By the sixteenth century, the consensus that Edward was killed by anal penetration with a red-hot spit had been firmly established, and this murder method—whose significations, as I have argued elsewhere, included invisibility and torture alongside sexual mimesis—appears in the overwhelming majority of early modern accounts of his reign. Cary's *History* is an exception, but the octavo edition of her text includes an added preface with the penetrative murder narrative drawn from Richard Baker's 1643 *Chronicle*, indicating that its inclusion was expected by the 1680s.

The account of Edward's murder in le Baker's *Chronicon* included a new detail which would prove influential:

they suddenly seized him as he lay on his bed, and smothered and suffocated him with great, heavy mattresses, in weight more than that of fifteen strong men. Then, with a plumber's soldering iron, made red hot, and thrust through a horn leading to the secret parts of his bowels, they burnt out his inner parts and then his breath of life. ...

In this way the knight, for all his strength, was overpowered. His loud cries were heard by men inside and outside the castle, who knew well enough that someone was suffering a violent death. Many people in Berkeley and some in the castle, as they themselves asserted, were awoken by his dying shouts and took compassion on the sufferer, making prayers for the holy soul of one emigrating from this world.⁶⁸

Le Baker's account is the earliest to depict the dying Edward's screams. His "loud cries" are emotionally and semantically communicative—listeners "knew ... that someone was suffering a violent death," and were moved to "compassion" and "prayers"—and are situated in relation to numerous auditors: "men inside and outside the castle," as well as "people in Berkeley" beyond. Edward's auditory performance extends beyond the confines of his prison to make both meaning and feeling in his wider locality, setting in motion a process of emotional

⁶⁶ Stow, *Chronicles*, sig. Y7v; see also Raphael Holinshed et al., "Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland," in *The Holinshed Project*, ed. Paulina Kewes, Ian W. Archer, Felicity Heal and Henry Summerson, 6:340, <http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed>.

⁶⁷ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 220–221; le Baker, *Chronicle*, 26–27.

⁶⁸ Le Baker, *Chronicle*, 32.

contagion akin to that which occurred in the early modern theatre.⁶⁹ The reader, positioned as hearer and provided with a prompt for their emotional engagement, becomes a further participant in this performative scene.

While the accounts of Edward's death in Stow's *Chronicles* and *Annales* and Holinshed's *Chronicles* follow le Baker's very closely, Holinshed's account develops the capacity of his cry for meaning-making even further:

they came suddenlie one night into the chamber where he laie in bed fast asleepe, and with heaue featherbeds or a table (as some write) being cast upon him, they kept him down and withall put into his fundament an horne, and through the same they thrust up into his bodie an hot spit, or (as other haue) through the pipe of a trumpet, a plumbers instrument of iron made verie hot, the which passing up into his intrailes, and being rolled to and fro, burnt the same, but so as no appearance of any wound or hurt outwardlie might be once perceived. His crie did mooue manie within the castell and towne of Berkley to compassion, plainelie hearing him utter a wailefull noise, as the tormentors were about to murthr him, so that diuerse being awakened therewith (as they themselves confessed) praied heartilie to God to receive his soule, when they understood by his crie what the matter ment.⁷⁰

Importantly, in this passage, Edward's death remains only implicit at the moment of penetration. The reader is told that his "intrailes" were "burnt" by the spit, but the ultimate consequence of this is not specified; in fact, the spit explicitly facilitates an invisible cause of death, meaning that "no appearance of any wound or hurt outwardlie might be once perceived." It is Edward's cry that communicates the fact of his murder: both to the reader, since the first time his death is referred to is in the phrase "plainelie hearing him utter a wailefull noise, as the tormentors were about to murthr him," and to the Berkeley townsfolk, who "understood by his crie what the matter ment." This performative description locates Edward's cry in a temporally complex position. The cry is central to the very construction of its own historical narrative: it participates in the communication and recording of historical events within its own present, as well as within the reader's present. Like Cary's choice of tense, Holinshed's narrative of Edward's murder has the effect of presenting historical events as contemporaneous with their reading.

We can see here the origin of the dying "cry" of Marlowe's Edward II, fit to "raise the town"; but we can also read these prose historical narratives, alongside the other examples discussed above, as performing Edward for their readers in their own right.⁷¹ In doing so, they

⁶⁹ Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing*, 10; Tribble, "Affective Contagion."

⁷⁰ Holinshed, "Chronicles," 6:341; c.f. Stow, *Chronicles*, sig. Z3v.

⁷¹ Christopher Marlowe, *Edward the Second*, ed. by Charles R. Forker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 5.5.113–114.

provide a vivid and viscerally painful depiction of regicide: an engaging, perhaps enjoyable, narrative, but also a sensationally memorable exemplum of the consequences of social, political and sexual disruption.

Interiority

The techniques of invented speech and performative description both position the reader as *outside* of the monarchs portrayed in prose historical narratives, seeing and hearing their performance in an experience similar to playgoing. Yet the characters of early modern drama were not significant solely in terms of their outwardness, the ways they used their bodies and voices to impact the audience. They were also engaging as interiorised characters. Dramatists used their text to suggest that their characters had an inner life: a network of undisclosed motivations and emotions which were not straightforwardly available for observation, but could be displayed, dissembled or discovered in the service of the play's plot and its engaging qualities.

While the interiority exhibited in early modern drama is, as Joe Falocco has shown, inconsistent and contingent, it remains a technique closely associated with the stage in critical imagination.⁷² Richard Preiss has even mapped its emergence in drama onto the physical space of the playhouse, arguing that interiority emerged as a dramatic technique in response to the new system of prepayment to enter purpose-built theatres: "The shape of the playhouse and the experience of entering it fostered the illusion that it possessed an inner working, an inner life, something just beyond the range of perception," and thus "Sustaining that illusion once an audience was there required not giving them what they paid for but deliberately giving them *less*." It required, that is, developing a dramaturgy which suggested that the characters performed on the stage themselves had an "inner life": that there was more to them than the audience were being permitted to see. This distinction between the inward and the outward is central to the identification of interiority in prose historical accounts.

As a result of its capacity to indicate human motivations, the emergence of interiority in historical accounts has also been located within the "historical revolution" paradigm, and identified as a key element of the classically-influenced "politic histories" composed by scholarly writers like Francis Bacon.⁷³ Yet if we shift our focus away from interiority as a technique to depict motivations, and consider it as an element of emotional representation, we can also detect it in texts of the kind from which the "historical revolution" supposedly represented a reactive departure. The fourteenth-century Latin account composed after 1330 at St Albans Abbey, popularly attributed to John de Trokelowe but probably composed by William Rishanger, attributes the fact that Edward "humbly began to be accustomed to stoop

⁷² Falocco, "Shakespeare Has It Both Ways"; Preiss, "Interiority," 48; Richard Levin, "Protesting Too Much in Shakespeare and Elsewhere, and the Invention/Construction of the Mind," *English Literary Renaissance* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 2007): 337–359.

⁷³ Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel*, 26; Woolf, *Reading History*, 34–35.

to the will of his nobles” around 1313 to his son’s birth: “Because of his birth ... his father was made so cheerful, that he might temper the sorrow which he had conceived for the death of Piers.”⁷⁴ This sentiment was adapted and romanticised further by the fifteenth-century chronicler Thomas Walsingham, whose *Chronica Maiora* was one of the many sources used by Raphael Holinshed in the first version of his influential *Chronicles*, printed in 1577.⁷⁵ Holinshed’s *Chronicles*—weighty, expensive, and (as seen above) described by their author as embracing a plain and unadorned style—are often presented in overviews of early modern history as the quintessential old-fashioned historical account, relating events without emotion, narrative structure or psychological scrutiny.⁷⁶ But Holinshed, and the syndicate of writers who reworked the *Chronicles* for their 1587 edition, drew on sources like Walsingham’s *Chronica*, Geoffrey le Baker’s *Chronicon*, and the *Brut* chronicle, all of which contained consciously crafted historical narratives with sensational, emotional detail and performative techniques like the interiority and invented speech discussed here. Consequently, it is no surprise that we find interiority, albeit inconsistently deployed, within Holinshed’s text.

In the 1577 account of Edward’s deposition, Holinshed describes how the Bishops of Winchester and Lincoln visited Edward ahead of the deposition party and attempted to persuade him to resign the crown to his son, threatening that if he refused, they would elect an alternative monarch who was not part of Edward’s direct lineage. Edward’s response reflects his inner decision-making process, and indicates a complex relation between his emotional interiority and outward appearance:

The King being sore troubled to heare suche displeasent newes, was brought into a marveyulous agonie: but in the ende, for the quyet of the Realme and doubt of further daunger to hymselfe, he determynd to follow theyr advice, and so when the other Commissioners were come, and that the Bishop of Hereford had declared the cause wherefore they were sent, the King in presence of them all, (notwithstanding his outward countenance discovered howe muche it inwardly grieved him) yet after he was come to himself, he answered that he knew that he was [fallen in] to this miserie through hys owne offences.⁷⁷

Edward here masters his initial passionate response (“marveyulous agonie”) in order to protect both himself and the stability of England. Subsequently, though his grief at the deposition is obvious to observers, he is clearly depicted as a character with an inner life. Holinshed’s

⁷⁴ John de Trokelowe, *Johannis de Trokelowe, et Henrici de Blanford, Monachorum S. Albani, Necnon Quorundam Anonymorum, Chronica et Annales*, ed. by H.T. Riley (London, 1866), 79–80.

⁷⁵ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 115.

⁷⁶ See, for example: Andrew Hadfield, “Shakespeare’s Tragedy and English History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 220; Munro, “Speaking History,” 225.

⁷⁷ Holinshed, “Chronicles,” 6:340.

parenthetical phrase “notwithstanding his outward countenance discovered howe much it inwardly grieved him” indicates that the correspondence between Edward’s inner and outer aspects should not be taken for granted: Edward’s “outward countenance” reveals his “inward” grief, but this is a contingent circumstance which must be explicitly pointed out. The alignment of Edward’s “countenance” with his emotions does not make him a “flat” character, but one who is excessively passionate (as Holinshed’s account has characterised him throughout) and thus has difficulty mastering his emotional responses.⁷⁸ This instance of interiority thereby underlines the unsuitability of Edward’s passionate character for the role of King, but also encourages the reader to empathise with him, paving the way for a sympathetic *de casibus* account of his mistreatment following his deposition, in the vein of Stow’s narrative analysed above.

In the 1587 edition of Holinshed, the preacher and writer Abraham Fleming interpolated numerous moments of moralistic commentary, extrapolating usable lessons from the *Chronicles*’ historical narratives. Following this episode, Fleming’s addition exclaims:

Ah lamentable ruine from roialtie to miserable calamitie, procured by them chéefelie that should have beene the pillars of the kings estate, and not the hooked engins to pull him downe from his throne! So that here we see it verefied by triall, that

—miserat infoelix est etiam rex,
Nec quenquam (mihi crede) facit diadema beatum.

[Misfortune comes even to the king,
Nor (I believe) does the crown make anyone happy.]⁷⁹

Importantly, this generalised interjection should not necessarily be seen as undermining or detracting from the reader’s potential emotional engagement with Edward as an individual character. As Helen Moore argues in relation to chivalric romance, “the favouring of classical exempla at moments of high feeling ... is not bloodless bookishness or conventionality, but a means of extrapolating intensities of experience that transcend the individual and his or her moment.”⁸⁰ It is important, then, to read the interiority of early modern texts—and particularly prose texts—carefully, and without importing the often unspoken modern assumption, drawn from novelistic conventions and individualism, that emotionally engaging interiority and characterisation is at odds with exemplarity or transferability. In both the 1577 and 1587 *Chronicles*, Edward is an interiorised character akin to those found in drama—particularly akin, we might suggest, to the passionate, garrulous and emotionally inconsistent Edward of Marlowe’s *Edward II*—whose fall is “lamentable” *both* because of the grief it causes him *and*

⁷⁸ Preiss, “Interiority,” 56.

⁷⁹ Holinshed, “Chronicles,” 6:340. My translation.

⁸⁰ Moore, “Chivalric Romance and Novella Collections,” 160.

because of its status as an example of the inevitable fall of kings.

While similar moments of scrutiny of the relationship between inward and outward aspects of historical figures can be found in other early modern chronicle accounts, Elizabeth Cary's account of Edward's reign exhibits a comparatively striking volume and consistency of interiorised characterisation. Much of the critical scrutiny of this technique has focused on Cary's characterisation of Queen Isabella.⁸¹ This has resulted on a few occasions in conclusions like that of Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, who—in an otherwise useful and rigorous analysis of Cary's use of the historic present—claim that her Edward is “a two-dimensional character” compared to “his queen, and those who surround and fail him, who receive the author's most developed treatments.”⁸² In fact, however, analysis of Cary's text reveals that her characterisation of Edward is highly developed and interiorised. While a critical focus on Cary's gender has often proved genuinely productive—as in Karen Raber's analysis of how the *History* “reflects Cary's experience of the gendering of proprietary relations”—it can also lead us to miss relevant factors in our analysis: as Michael Cornelius observes, “In constructing Cary as an author, critics often seem to have difficulty looking past her gender and further into what she writes in the work itself.”⁸³ In this case, her construction of interiority does not just reflect her desire to construct a complex and relatable female protagonist: it extends to her male protagonist too. As such, it should be seen to indicate her careful deployment of performative techniques, developed through her work as a dramatist, in order to realise the emotionally and politically engaged potential of her historical account.

Substantial room in Cary's *History* is devoted to Edward's “unquiet thoughts,” “restless passions,” and “inward agitation” regarding whether to recall Gaveston following his father's death. Her character of Edward has, like the dramatic characters analysed by Preiss, explicitly undisclosed depths: when trying to decide whether to recall his beloved Gaveston against his father's deathbed wish, “he brings himself to the height of such an inward agitation, that he falls into a sad retired Melancholy; while all men (as they justly might) wondered, but few did know the reason”. As Meredith Skura rightly observes, this agonising Edward distinguishes Cary's Edward from the Edwards of other prose texts, who “wantonly follow their appetites without thinking”;⁸⁴ and this internal wrangling over decision-making, weighing up emotional and political concerns, functions to construct Edward as an interiorised character. Later, when wishing to recall Gaveston from his second exile, Edward relies on his nobles' potential empathy for his emotional suffering in order to persuade them to relent, a device that encourages the reader to empathise also: “he intreats them (if any of them had been truly touch'd with a disease of the same quality) that they would indifferently measure his Condition

⁸¹ See: Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices*, 81–93; Lewalski, *Writing Women*, 207–211.

⁸² Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice, “Shaping a Drama,” 80.

⁸³ Karen Raber, “Gender and Property: Elizabeth Cary and the History of Edward II,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 26, no. 2 (2000): 199–227; Cornelius, *Edward II*, 214. See also: Skura, “Elizabeth Cary and Edward II.”

⁸⁴ Cary, *History*, sig. C2v; Skura, “Elizabeth Cary and Edward II,” 87.

by their own Sufferings.”⁸⁵

This interiority renders Cary’s account emotionally engaging: the reader is encouraged to empathise with Edward’s emotional pain, even if they are often not encouraged to support his ultimate decisions. Taking his cue from feminist critics who see in the *History* Cary’s personal identification with Isabella, Cornelius suggests that these features of the narrative indicate her identification with Edward. Building, though unacknowledged, on Skura’s suggestion that “If Cary was a kind of Isabel she was a kind of Edward too”—on the basis of Edward’s passion, his defiance of duty, and his imprisonment—Cornelius sees “Edward’s sexuality” as a “metaphor for Cary’s Catholicism.”⁸⁶ I am keen here, however, not to interpret this evidence of Cary’s craft—her use of performative techniques, drawn from her dramatic work, in a prose text—as *only* an expression of her individual experience. Biographical readings like this one can be helpful, as Raber and Skura have shown, but also potentially reductive, and in this case (given Cornelius’s depiction of Edward as a member of an oppressed sexual minority comparable to Catholics) potentially anachronistic.⁸⁷ Whether we see Cary as expressing her own identification with Edward or with Isabella, we run the risk of obscuring the way she consistently calls attention to her text’s contemporary political utility, particularly in terms of favouritism.⁸⁸ This means that, as in Holinshed’s account, her interiorised depictions of Edward emphasise his passionate nature and the amount of time and energy he devotes to working through his emotions rather than being politically decisive and effective. This problem is made explicit in her account of his grieving process following Gaveston’s death. In addition to the performative description analysed above, Cary uses her narrative of Edward’s grief to construct his interiority and identify the political problems posed by his emotional responses:

His manly tears bewray his inward sorrow, and make him seem to melt with height of Passion; He could not sleep, nor scarce would eat, or speak but faintly; which makes him living dye with restless torments ... His nearer Friends amazed to see his Passion, resolve to set him free, or loose his favour; boldly they press into his Cell of darkness, and freely let him know his proper error. They lay before him, how vain a thing it was to mourn or sorrow for things past help, or hope of all redemption: His greatness would be lost in such fond actions, and might endanger him and eke the Kingdom.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Cary, *History*, sig. E2r.

⁸⁶ Skura, “Elizabeth Cary and Edward II,” 91; Cornelius, *Edward II*, 225.

⁸⁷ Raber, “Gender and Property”; Skura, “Elizabeth Cary and Edward II.” On early modern conceptualisations of Edward II’s sexual behaviour and related terminology, see: Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 35–61, 69–94.

⁸⁸ Skura, “Elizabeth Cary and Edward II,” 83. See also: Britland, “‘Kings Are But Men,’” 34–42; Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 188; Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 194–195, 204–205.

⁸⁹ Cary, *History*, sig. I2v–K1r.

The interiority of Edward's character is clearly evident here—his outward “manly tears,” like the “countenance” of Holinshed's Edward, inadvertently reveal his “inward sorrow”—as is the intensity of his suffering, which leaves him unable to “sleep,” “eat,” or “speak.”⁹⁰ But this interiorised characterisation does not just elicit the reader's sympathy. Edward's unnamed friends guide the reader's interpretation by framing his grief as “errour”: not just in its futility, but in its foolishness (“fond actions”) and potentially grave political consequences. The reader might feel for Edward, but Cary's characterisation here also encourages them to reflect on what makes him an unsuitable monarch. Both of these effects help to engage the reader in search of a narrative of the past which is both enjoyable and useful.

Conclusion

Prose narratives of the past should, then, be seen alongside history plays as forms which provided access to performance of historical characters. As we have seen, the performative techniques employed by writers of these prose texts facilitated both emotional and political engagement with the past: sometimes guiding the reader's response, sometimes rendering political transgressions memorable, sometimes shaping the narrative of a monarch's life into an exemplary *de casibus* structure. Attention to these performative elements of historical prose thus prompts us to reassess the complexity, interiority and vividness of chronicles; to augment our understanding of the process by which history was made usable, including as part of the process of engaging with and contesting contemporary royal power; and to more fully appreciate the structures that underpinned and enabled early modern people's emotional relationships to the past.

My choice to focus on narratives of Edward II's reign has allowed me to discuss the use of performative techniques to develop the *de casibus* narrative of his rise and fall, as well as their relationship to the political exemplarity of his favouritism and deposition. But in addition, the very fact that we can read Edward II's story specifically in terms of its early modern readers' emotional engagement—given that this story also, of course, revolves around Edward's transgressive romantic and sexual relationships with his male favourites—underlines the fact that this process of engagement was only intermittently a censorious or judgmental one. Readers might have been encouraged to condemn Edward's sexual transgressions, but they were also, at independent moments, encouraged to empathise with his pain.⁹¹ The fact that this empathy was in part a means to a political end—as Korhonen puts it, “Without the text seducing the reader to feel for the unfortunate characters of these moralities, empathy would not lead him to examine his own sinfulness, which was at least the overt explanation for the usefulness of these texts”—does not diminish its force.⁹² Emphasising the fact that early

⁹⁰ See: Michael Drayton, “Peirs Gaveston Earle of Cornwall,” in *Works*, ed. J. William Hebel, 5 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1931), 1:157–208, ll. 1021–1026, 1321–1322, 1327–1330.

⁹¹ Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 69–94.

⁹² Korhonen, “Beauty, Masculinity and Love Between Men,” 141.

modern readers were encouraged, in concrete and consistent ways, to engage emotionally and sympathetically with a sexually transgressive historical monarch is a crucial component in the ongoing scholarly project of diversifying our sense of how early modern people talked, wrote and thought about same-sex love, and demonstrating that there *was* space for sympathetic representations.⁹³

More broadly, I suggest that observing the extent to which the people of early modern England composed and accessed performative representations of the past might help us to reimagine the relationship they had to that past. We might frame this question as “what kind of historicism did early modern people practice?”—a question usefully posed in a different direction by Thomas Fulton, who demonstrates how early modern political rhetoric developed through “historicist interpretive methods.”⁹⁴ As Mike Rodman Jones has argued, “all historiographies might be seen as intellectual experiments with the shape of time”; and the vivid, sometimes even present–tense performances of historical figures that we find in prose historical narratives point to a slippage between past and present, a capacity to experience the past as contingently contemporaneous, at moments of heightened emotional and/or political relevance.⁹⁵ Moreover, the interiorised and emotionally engaging characterisation of historical figures that these performative depictions facilitate might be seen to point towards a continuous, universal understanding of human nature on the part of early modern writers and readers. Clearly, the usability of history required an element of presentism: in order for historical events and decisions to provide useful precepts or replicatable patterns, human nature and moral values must be interpreted in some sense as universal, though it is also clear that (as Fulton shows) humanist scholars at least practised a form of historical relativism.⁹⁶ But the consistent inclusion of emotional detail as part of the performance of historical figures in prose texts provides further evidence of a presentist understanding of human emotion, as well as human morality. Machiavelli’s pronouncement that “in all cities and in all peoples there are the same desires and the same passions” might be read in this light not just as emphasising the usability of historical examples, but as expressing a presentist theory of universal emotion which we can also see reflected in historical texts.⁹⁷ Perhaps when we ourselves experience and express emotional identification with people of the past—an impulse that may be behind

⁹³ See: Jeffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare’s Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Tom Linkinen, *Same-Sex Sexuality in Later Medieval English Culture* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015); Paul Hammond, *Love Between Men in English Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Heyam, *Reputation of Edward II*, 101–129.

⁹⁴ Thomas Fulton, “The Politics of Renaissance Historicism: Valla, Erasmus, Colet, and More,” in *Rethinking Historicism from Shakespeare to Milton*, ed. Ann Baynes Coiro and Thomas Fulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 88–89.

⁹⁵ Jones, “Uses of Medievalism,” 93.

⁹⁶ Worden, “Historians and Poets,” 77; Robin Headlam Wells, “Historicism and ‘Presentism’ in Early Modern Studies,” *Cambridge Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2000): 59; Fulton, “Politics of Renaissance Historicism,” esp. 106.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Worden, “Historians and Poets,” 77.

feminist readings of Elizabeth Cary's work, and that is avowedly behind the work of scholars of the queer past like Tom Linkinen, Michael Cornelius, and myself, working in the vein of Carolyn Dinshaw—we are reading in a more early modern way than we might at first assume.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Linkinen, *Same-Sex Sexuality*, 307; Cornelius, *Edward II*, 265–268; Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 21.